

## MS 86

### Papers of Frances English: Letters regarding *Blue poles* acquisition

---

- Summary
  - Administrative Information
  - Biographical Note
  - Associated Content
  - Acronyms Used
  - Binder Description
- 

#### Summary

Creator:	Unknown
Title:	Papers of Frances English: Letters regarding <i>Blue poles</i> acquisition
Date range:	1973-1974
Reference number:	MS 86
Extent:	1 binder

#### Overview

Contains letters from artists, historians, authors and curators who responded to an open letter to the Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, about James Mollison's (Director of the Australian National Gallery, 1977-1989) decision, and the Australian Government's subsequent agreement, to purchase Jackson Pollock's *Blue poles*. Includes correspondence, one greeting card, newspaper articles and copied newspaper articles.

#### Keywords

*Blue poles*, petition, taxpayers, Australian National Gallery, Prime Minister, Australian artists, art dealers, Labor Government, committee, policy, commission.

#### Key Names

Betty Archdale, John Brackenreg, Manning Clark, Leonard Cox, William Dargie, Reid Douglas, Frances English, Dorothy Green, Keith Hancock, S S Hawke, Mr Ben

Heller, Sali Herman, Ursula Hoff, Max Hutchinson, Kenneth Jack, Alan Marshall, James Mollison, John Perceval, Jackson Pollock, Margaret Priest, Colin Roderick, Colin Sykes, Kylie Tennant, Dora Toovey, Alan Walker, Patrick White and Gough Whitlam.

---

## **Administrative Information**

### **Access**

Contact the National Gallery of Australia Research Library reference desk librarians.  
Phone +61 2 6240 6530  
Email [rlr@nga.gov.au](mailto:rlr@nga.gov.au)

### **Provenance**

This collection was purchased through gallery funding.

### **Preferred Citation Note**

MS 86 Papers of Frances English: Letters regarding *Blue poles* acquisition, [Description and date of item], [Box/folder number], National Gallery of Australia Research Library Archives, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

---

## **Biographical Note**

*Blue poles* is an American painting that has become an Australian icon. This archive holds records of the responses of various authoritative people, for the short period of time spanning 1972 to 1973, in regards to the purchase in 1972 of Jackson Pollock's *Blue poles* (1952). These records offer insight and greater context into the furore and controversy that surrounded the acquisition of *Blue poles*.

With government and council approval James Mollison acquired *Blue poles* for the ANG (1973) after the art dealer and gallery director Max Hutchinson brokered a deal with Ben Heller to sell the monumental painting, the last of its size painted by Pollock. The ensuing media reaction created controversy of legendary proportions in particular regarding the then government's (1972–975) involvement. Over time the painting has become a major drawcard of the NGA's collection and is on permanent display.

The significance of this work of art is important for myriad reasons including as an acquisition precedent for public collecting institutions, promoting the international value of the NGA collection, increasing public awareness of art and recognising the social context of the time, culturally, politically and economically when regarding art.

---

## **Associated Content**

### **Subject**

International art, American Abstract Expressionism

### **Relationship to the National Gallery of Australia Research Library**

The Research Library also holds the papers of the art dealer Max Hutchinson (Papers of Marion Kaselle) from his American galleries, the Papers of Gallery A, Max Hutchinson's Australian galleries and the Hogarth Galleries where an exhibition titled Artists for Whitlam was held (included in the 1974 file is an open letter to 'All Australian Art Lovers'. The International Art and Artist files for both Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner are also held in the Research Library.

### **Relationship to the National Gallery of Australia Collection**

Jackson Pollock's *Blue poles* is a highly significant work of art held in the national collection. Other works by Pollock are held in the collection and works by Lee Krasner, Pollock's wife, are also held in the national collection.

---

## **Acronyms used**

ANG – Australian National Gallery (prior to 1992)

NGA – National Gallery of Australia (1992–current)

---

## **Binder Description**

### **Binder 1**

- Auction Lot description
- Auction list of contents 'Blue Poles Letters'

- Letter to Mrs Frances English from Peter Sculthorpe's secretary, 13th November 1973
- Letter to Mrs Frances English from Patrick White, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1973
- Letter to Mrs English from John Perceval, 6<sup>th</sup> November 1973
- Letter to Mrs English from Sali Herman, 1<sup>st</sup> November 1973
- Letter to Mrs English from William Dargie, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1973
- Letter to Mrs English from Kenneth Jack, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1973
- Letter to Mrs English from Keith Hancock, 1<sup>st</sup> November 1973
- Letter to Mrs English from Manning Clark, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1974
- Letter to Mrs English from Margaret Priest, 7<sup>th</sup> November 1973
- Letter to Frances from Alan Marshall, 29<sup>th</sup> November 1973
- Letter to Mrs English from Betty Archdale, 18<sup>th</sup> November 1973
- Letter to Mrs English from Dorothy Green, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1973
- Letter to Mrs English from Ursula Hoff, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1973
- Letter to Mrs English from Leonard Cox, 10<sup>th</sup> November 1973
- Letter to Mrs English from Kylie Tennant, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1973
- Open letter to the Prime Minister, Mr Whitlam from S. S. Hawke F. R. A. S.
- Open letter to the Prime Minister, Mr Whitlam (edited) from Dora Toovey
- Letter to Mrs English from Reid Douglas, 6<sup>th</sup> October
- Letter to Mrs English from Reid Douglas, 27<sup>th</sup> October
- Letter to Mrs English from John Brackenreg, 16<sup>th</sup> November
- Letter to Mrs English from H. R. Henderson, 6<sup>th</sup> November 1973
- Letter to Mrs English from G. Sargent on behalf of Colin Roderick, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1973
- Letter to the editor of The Canberra Times from Colin Sykes, 21<sup>st</sup> November 1973
- Letter to Frances from Colin Sykes, 8<sup>th</sup> November with attachment newspaper article *National Gallery on way* Sydney Morning Herald, 8<sup>th</sup> November 1973
- Card bearing reproduction of Jackson Pollock's *Blue Poles* 1952 and season's greetings from the Prime Minister and Mrs Gough Whitlam, December 1973, includes accompanying envelope

- Newspaper article *NGA at a mere 30 years of age houses nation's most valuable collection* by Julieanne Strachan The Canberra Times, 13<sup>th</sup> October 2012
- Newspaper article *The Perils of Art in Sydney Town* by Patrick White Sydney Morning Herald, 11<sup>th</sup> November, 1974
- Newspaper article *'Blue Poles' report 'complete hogwash'*
- Copied newspaper article *Canberra's long-running serial Blue Poles: episode 1* by Lea Fitzgerald The Australian Financial Review 26<sup>th</sup> September 1973
- Copied newspaper article *Sali blasts our\$1,300,000 'masterpiece'* the Manly Daily 25<sup>th</sup> October 1973
- Copied newspaper articles *Painting produced in drunken orgy?* Sydney Daily Mirror 15<sup>th</sup> October 1973 and *Man who paid \$1.3m confirms drunks story* The Australian 8<sup>th</sup> November
- Copied newspaper article *Ben Heller blues A summary of the Pollock purchase saga* Melbourne Herald 17<sup>th</sup> October 1973